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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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-* EU Slaps Microsoft With Hefty Fine! *-
-* Microsoft Sees January for Vista Release! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Ordinarily, I'd have my editorial comments completed prior to our release date, but this week was a little weird. We've had some awful weather for part of the week - thunderstorms with torrential downpours of rain and hail. One of my [canine] kids hates thunder. When she hears it, it's time to hide under the nearest object that she can fit under. This week, it was under one of my two computer desks - usually the one that I want to be seated! So this week, when I wanted to write my editorial comments, "Buffy" was securely entrenched under my desk. There was no moving her, so I postponed getting things done.

A few weeks ago, I mentioned that I was going to let you know how I felt about my newly-acquired DSL, and compare it to those lightning-fast days gone by with 19,200 baud on the Atari machines. Well, I didn't manage to get the wireless DSL going on my machine (it was fine on my wife's set-up). Fortunately, I decided to get some outside help because I wasn't getting anywhere. I called "Geek Squad" (I love their TV ads!). Good thing that I did because I never would have figured it out! The guy was here for almost two hours, but got it working. I haven't had much time to use it yet, but I'm sure that I will get some lengthy use, and will report back. I can say that I don't miss the dial-up process!

So, to get this week's issue out reasonably on time, let me end this now, and make some last-minute finishing touches up so we can get this issue to bed!

Until next time...

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RUN!Only and RUN!Lib Update

Hi!

RUN!Only and RUN!Lib have been updated!

Most striking feature is probably the possibility to redim fields.

Apart from that lots of bugfixes and little improvements have been made.

More info on the RUN! Software homepage under "Produkte" and
"Service/Download"

http://www.run-software.de

The page is in German, but there are very comprehensive docs in the
archive in both, German and English! Please do read them!

Cheers, Ingo =;->

mmSAP - SAP Player for GNU/Linux Released

mmSAP is a SAP player for GNU/Linux. It has a gtkmm user interface.

- Libraries required: libSAP 1.51,SDL 1.2.10, gtkmm 2.8.2
- Source code available.

Link for atarians from former Czechoslovakia:
http://www.baktra.wz.cz/software/mmsap.html

Link for other atarians:
http://www.baktra.wz.cz/english.html

GFA-Basic Editor v1.40 Released

For those that enjoy programming in BASIC.

The list-of-changes is rather large. Please read the documentation for all
the details.

Note: This version will not work correctly with previous configuration
files. You must delete the *.gbe files in your \home\ directory before you
use it!

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FreeMiNT   http://sparemint.atariforge.net/sparemint/ [Free your mind...]
Atari Team http://setiathome.berkeley.edu/team_display.php?teamid=30472
L. Pursell http://www.bright.net/~gfabasic/ [AtarIRC, GFA-Basic, Hades060]

Advan BASIC Re-released As Public Domain

A commercial Advan BASIC programming language has been now re-released.
After over twenty years its author, William Graziano made it widely
available under the public domain license. The compiler, tools and full
documentation may be downloaded from the http://advan.oldos.net/ site.
There is also a competition announced for the best program written in this
great BASIC implementation (look at comp.sys.atari.8bit posts).

URL: http://www.atari8.info/dodajkomentarz.php?news=405&lang=en

New Site of The BITS Club

*** B I T S ***

Hello!

The BITS Club, a modern scene group programming for Atari ST, Amiga, Unix and Windows, presents You their new site in WWW:

http://thebitsclub.tripod.com/index.html

We have been using geocities.com a while, but the bandwidth/hour was not enough for so many fans! ;-)... Anyway we still sponsor geocities at:

http://www.geocities.com/thebitsclub/

Greetings,
SoLo2

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It’s going to be another short column this week... I’ll tell ya that right off the bat. I’ve been moving from one location (rented) to another (mortgaged) for the past couple of weeks, and I didn’t have time to "seed" the newsgroup with interesting(?) questions.

To tell you the truth, I’m not as chock-full of interesting questions as I used to be. Maybe, if you have a chance, you could visit comp.sys.atari.st and ask a question or two. You know, one of those questions that’s not really of any great import, but something that you wondered about or wanted clarification about, or maybe something you already know the answer to, but want to share

with other people.

While cleaning out some old stuff during the move, I came across a couple of old badges from computer shows I've been to... WAACE, Blueridge, and the ACT show to be exact. They brought back memories of a time when the Atari world was, if not robust, at least more active than it is now. Users were still discovering Atari computers, vendors were still able to making a living selling Atari wares, and computer magazines still mentioned the ST line of computers... as also-rans, to be sure, but they were mentioned. Today, we're lucky to see an accurate "has been" or "also ran" article that mentions that Atari computers were once a viable alternative to the 'big blue machine' or the 'multi-colored fruit'.

Hell, I can remember when industry experts were scratching their heads, trying to figure out where the industry was going next, and if the public would be ready for it. Would the general public really get the hang of using computers, or would they forever remain the domain of the nerd? Well, I've been a nerd for most of my life, and I wasn't sure, either. When I first heard of this wondrous network known as 'The Internet' it was the provenience of University geeks and military contractors.

Obviously, this thing was never going to fly with the general public. Even though CompuServe, Delphi and GEnie were making provisions to be able to send email to other services and internet addresses, the need for these strange protocols and viewing programs seemed like just so much hype. I mean, who could conceive of a program so large that it's got to be written by a team? And all of that work just to go online? And they're going to give the program and stuff away for free? I don't think so, Charlie. I wasn't born yesterday.

Well, okay. I was wrong... again. Yeah, not a rare occurrence, I'm afraid. Once I wrote a piece for a national magazine saying that the age of per-hour billing for online access was soon to go the way of the dodo, and that 'per-compute-cycle' billing was going to be the wave of the future, and that it'd be a good thing for users, since you'd only pay for the time that the remote computer was actually doing something for you instead of for the minutes you'd been connected. It made sense at the time, and I'd received lots of correspondence saying that I was on to something and that compute-cycle billing would surely become the wave of the future.

Oh well.

But to be fair, who could possibly hope to be able to foresee the future of an industry that hasn't stopped growing? I mean, the lowest low-end video card now has more RAM that our whole computers had back then. And clock speeds... well, let's not get into that. I find it too depressing.

Anyway, those old show badges made me sit and think for a while about those shows, more than a decade ago, and how they got press coverage in all the major trade magazines. It was quite a bit easier back then to find other Atari users. Heck, I didn't even join up with a Users' Group until after Atari had stopped making computers all together. There was, quite simply, no need. While Atari users were never as plentiful as Mac or PC users, you tended to run into them much more often then than now.

It was nice to be able to instantly find common ground with a complete stranger. We all knew most of the catch-phrases and popular applications and games, and could converse intelligently about our computers and their wares.

It’s true that the ST wasn’t the only computer to garner this kind of support... the Commodore Amiga started out at about the same time, and it’s still got a following. Heck, even the Texas Instruments TI99-4A and the Coleco ADAM still have semi-active and, at times, almost militant userbase.

But as I’ve said many times before, the ST was always special to me. It seems to have it’s own personality. I’m not talking about little idiosyncrasies like having to let it warm up for a minute or two before trying to load from a particular partition from my hard drive, or having to thump my monochrome monitor on the side to get the image to clear. I’m talking about the PERSONALITY of the machine... that undefinable something that gave you that comforting feeling when you sat down at the keyboard. It’s a feeling that I’ve gotten with every ST-series computer that I’ve ever owned except for one.... it was a 1040 STfm that just didn’t want to be friends. It worked alright, it never malfunctioned or broke down, it just didn’t "feel" the same as the others.

And no emulator or virtual machine ever had the same feel as my tried-and-true friends. Even though they were running ROM images from my own machines, were running at the same speed as my old machines, using the same resolution and number of colors, and running the same software, the emulators were just soulless imitations of what I had known.

More important than the machines, however, were the people. I’ve made so many friends while using my STs that they’ve become a major part of the experience and, truth be told, the reason that I still deal with the Atari world. These people are the best, and many of them I consider to be among my best friends. Most people just can’t wrap their minds around the idea that good, close friends can be people that you’d never met in person. Their loss, right? <g>

I’m going to save the UseNet posts from this week, and combine them with next week’s, so that we’ll have a decent amount to talk about.

Who knows? Maybe I’ll even have my spiffy new DSL connection up and running by then! Yep, I’ve ordered a 6 Mb/sec connection for the new house instead of the 1.5 Mb/sec connection I’ve got at the apartment. While more expensive, the cost isn’t horrible... hell, I spent more per month when I first went to using my 2400 baud modem on CompuServe! Man, was I the envy of all my friends then! 2400 baud seemed like the greatest thing in the world. Who could ever need more than that? Even Atari’s Director of Communications had a take on the situation... 9600 baud was only used by pirates, and no self-respecting, law-abiding Atari user would ever consider a 9600 baud modem.

My, how the times have changed.

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PS3 Backwards Compatible!
'Call of Duty 3' Enlists Classics!
Xbox 360 To Go Retro!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

PS3 To Play All PSOne, PS2 Games

Sony's PlayStation 3 will play almost every PlayStation game, a senior IBM staffer has claimed. It's not clear how many PSOne titles won't play, but according to Tom Reeves, VP of semiconductor and technology services at IBM, even 40 of them was too high a number for Sony.

In an Electronic News interview, Reeves said: "Sony is very concerned about quality and backward compatibility. They want to get this right. They tested game after game after game. When there were about 40 PlayStation 1 games that didn t work properly, that didn t pass their criteria for quality."

Sony's PlayStation chief, Ken Kutaragi, first promised the PS3 would play PlayStation and PS2 games back in September 2003. However, how well the next-generation console will do so and across how many titles has always been open to question, especially once Microsoft shipped its Xbox 360 console, which still plays only a sub-set of original Xbox titles, using emulation software. As of June 2006, the 360 will play only 227 Xbox games, though ongoing updates to the emulation code regularly add more to the list.

'Call of Duty 3' Enlists Classic War Movies

In creating the upcoming Call of Duty 3 game, the game developers at Treyarch returned to the source of inspiration for previous games in the successful combat series: war movies.

Where recent World War II games were clearly inspired by more recent films such as Saving Private Ryan and Enemy at the Gates, Call of Duty 3 (due this fall) takes some cues from classics The Longest Day and A Bridge Too

Far.

"We started looking at those great war movies where you have one big event that is viewed from multiple perspectives," says Treyarch's creative director, Rich Farrelly. As a result, Call of Duty 3 will have "lots of great intense battles with the Allies, the U.S. and British, and we get to introduce the Canadians and Polish forces that players haven't seen before."

Cinematic flourishes abound in the game, which follows the Allies' attempts to liberate France after D-Day: Air sorties can be seen in the distance as fellow troops advance over the detailed terrain. Whizzing bullets, resounding detonations and rampaging tanks - not to mention frenetic squad members - create a surround-sound field that rivals movies.

In their attempt at realism, the developers - whose last game, Call of Duty 2: Big Red One, followed the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division campaigns, including the landing at Normandy - digitally scanned actors and uniforms and synthesized them with squadron-sized motion-capture sessions. Real World War II weapons and vehicles were referenced, and surviving veterans were consulted.

Some new maneuvers aim to immerse the player even more in action that "gets closer to what happens in a real fight," says retired Army Lt. Col. Hank Keirsey, a consultant on this and other Call of Duty games.

New "battle actions" involve players more intimately in the game, including hand-to-hand combat, planting munitions charges and new weapons operations. "You have to aim quickly during the heat of battle," Keirsey says.

An online multiplayer version of the game will be playable by up to 24 players; combatants can drive tanks, jeeps and motorcycles with sidecars.

Beyond entertainment, the team at Treyarch hopes to educate players about the legacy of those who fought in World War II. Keirsey recorded the accounts of several veterans in his research and hopes to compile them for DVD-like special features in a possible collector's edition of the game.

"When a young gamer plays the game, he gets to tune in to this guy to hear these stories that have never been told," Keirsey says. "If we hadn't talked to (the veterans), all these stories would have been lost."

Microsoft To Release 1980s Games for Xbox

Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 may exemplify the high-tech future of video game consoles, but the company is hoping some of its avid players still pine for the good old days of Pac-Man and Frogger.

Microsoft plans Wednesday to offer some additional updated versions of popular 1980s-era games through Xbox Live Arcade, an online service that lets people download free trial games and buy them for $5 to $15.

The company will offer a game every Wednesday for the next five weeks, including some retro games with higher-end graphics and new ways to play together. The first game on offer is the log-hopping, traffic-dodging classic, Frogger.

Greg Canessa, a group manager for Xbox Live Arcade, said the downloadable games service has been surprisingly successful for the company. About 5 million free trial games have been downloaded by Xbox 360 owners, he said, and 21.7 percent of those have been "converted," meaning a person decided to pay for the permanent version.

Many people initially thought the Xbox Live Arcade, with its focus on less complex games, would be a potential draw for children, women or older players who don't fit the young male demographic traditionally associated with Xbox 360 owners. But Canessa said they've found that even the so-called hardcore gamers are interested in the arcade games, and willing to pay for them.

Microsoft currently has 20 arcade games available for sale to people who own an Xbox 360, the second iteration of Microsoft's video game console. Canessa said they hope to have about 50 titles available by the end of the year.

Half-Life 2: Episode Two - The Return of Team Fortress 2 and Other Surprises

Valve's Gabe Newell drops some major announcements regarding Episode Two, including Xbox 360 and PS3 support, and the return of Team Fortress 2.

Valve founder Gabe Newell dropped a number of bombshells regarding Half-Life 2: Episode Two at EA's summer press event. Newell revealed that the vaunted PC first-person shooter franchise is going to arrive on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 and that the PC and console versions will ship with not only a new single-player game called Portals, but also with Team Fortress 2, the ambitious multiplayer game that Valve tried to develop in the late 90s but that quietly disappeared later on.

Half-Life 2 fans are already aware of the episodic content that Valve is producing, in place of a Half-Life 3. Episode One, the first chapter, was released earlier this summer to great acclaim. Well, Episode Two won't just continue the story of Gordon Freeman, Alyx Vance, and the rest of humanity battling the alien Combine for control of Earth.

For one, Valve is planning to release Episode Two simultaneously on the PC, Xbox 360, and the PlayStation 3. And it wouldn't make sense to give the console players Episode 2, which is essentially the middle of the story, so the console versions of Episode Two will also include Half-Life 2, as well as Episode One. That's right, both Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 players will be able to get their hands on the entire Half-Life 2 saga in one package.

In addition to that bombshell, Newell revealed that all versions of Episode Two will ship with a separate single-player game called Portals. This is something of an insanely inspired puzzle game that takes advantage of the Source engine, judging from the hilarious trailer that Newell showed. The trailer took the form of a training video for a new employee of an advanced corporation in the Half-Life 2 universe.

The video shows a diagram and explains that as an employee of this company, you may have to find the emergency exit to a certain room. However, there are often obstacles in your way, like a gaping chasm. No problem, because all you need to use is your Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device to create dimensional doorways that let you mess with reality. For example, if

there’s gaping chasm between you and your objective, just shoot a portal on the far side of the room, then shoot a portal open on your side, then enter the portal. You’ll instantly transport from one side of the room to the next by walking through the portal (you’ll even see yourself going through the portal).

That’s the simplest example of how to use the portal gun. In other situations, you may be under fire by a gun droid. So all you need to do is shoot a portal open over the gun, then shoot a portal open beneath a crate, then watch the crate fall through the hole and crush the gun. It gets even crazier, and the diagrams shown in the trailer showed some incredibly crazy things that you can attempt, like creating a series of portals so that you’re constantly chasing yourself. Some of the puzzles sound like they’ll be -impossible,- so the challenge will be to figure out how to use the portal gun.

This promises to be an incredibly puzzle-style first-person experience, which Newell says is part of the goal. We wanted to take physics out of this domain as a tool that lets you bounce grenades around to how can we really change the game experience for our customers, he said.

Newell then dropped an even bigger bombshell by showing off Team Fortress 2. Those familiar with Valve’s history know that Team Fortress 2 was an ambitious multiplayer action game that was supposed to come out after the original Half-Life. However, the game quietly disappeared after years of development, and it was assumed that Valve dropped the project.

Well, Team Fortress 2 is back and will be included with Episode Two, and it looks like nothing else on the market. Newell explained that Valve wanted to make this action game distinct, so the graphics (which use the Source engine) look like a Pixar animated movie. To reinforce this, the carious character classes in the game look like cartoon caricatures. These include the Medic with the huge needle or the Demoman with the sticks of explosives. Other classes include the Heavy, the Spy, the Scout, the Engineer, the Sniper, the Soldier, and the Pyro. Newell says that the goal with Team Fortress 2 is to create -the best looking and best-playing class-based multiplayer game.- Team Fortress 2 is certainly unique in appearance, so we’ll see how it plays.

Valve will release more information about Episode Two and all this new content throughout the fall, and more announcements will be revealed as the year goes on. We’ll obviously keep a close eye on it, so make sure to check back with us for more details.

New Lord of the Rings Game Announced

Electronic Arts, Inc., the world’s largest video games publisher, says it is planning to release a role-playing game based on the British author J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings trilogy.

"We will launch the Lord of the Rings game at the end of 2007," says Electronic Arts spokesperson Scott Gamel. "The game will incorporate elements from the J.R.R. Tolkien novels and also from the recent Lord of the Rings movie trilogy, which was produced by New Zealander Paul Jackson."

Known as The Lord of the Rings, The White Council, the game will be developed at Electronic Arts’ Redwood City, California studio. The

executive producer for the role-playing game will be Electronic Arts developer Steve Gray.

The Lord of the Rings movies, which are the copyright of U.S.-based New Line Cinema, were a smash hit, grossing US$3 billion at the box office worldwide.

Frustratingly, Electronic Arts is giving away very few details about its new game. "We are not disclosing a lot of information about the game at this stage, as it has not been developed yet," Gamel says. "The game is intended for the Xbox 360, the PlayStation 3 and the PC. It will not be available for Nintendo’s Wii games console format."

Gamel says that in the Electronic Arts game, a human player will be able to take on the character of an elf, a hobbit, a man or a dwarf. "The goal will be for the player to become a hero through the way he or she interacts with the other on-screen characters," he says.

In a statement, Electronic Arts says that the game will explore the world of Tolkien’s Middle-earth, the imaginary land portrayed in the British author’s books.

Players will form alliances with the White Council, whose members include the Tolkien characters Gandalf, Galadriel and Elrond, Electronic Arts says in the statement.

Also, Electronic Arts says that the game, which it describes as being "highly graphical," has yet to be rated by the ESRB. It has created a Website, www.whitecouncil.ea.com, where more information is provided about the Lord of the Rings game.

Mukul Krishna, a analyst covering the digital entertainment industry for U.S. market research firm Frost & Sullivan, says he expects the Lord of the Rings role-playing game to be a big success for Electronic Arts.

"Announcing this new game is a very smart move on the part of Electronic Arts," Krishna says. "The company is right on the button with the game. All the indications are that Lord of the Rings role-playing game will be a big success and will have a lot of sales."

Krishna said that the world has seen blockbuster-selling video games become movies. "Now we are seeing blockbuster movies such as the Lord of the Rings become very successful video games," he says.

Krishna says the new game will take full advantage of new video games technology.

"The new generation of games consoles are so much more interactive and let players do a lot more than older-generation consoles," Krishna says "For example, you can wave the new consoles around in the air, if you want to mimic a sword fight, and the charactiers on the screen will also wave their arms in the air as if fighting."

"The role-playing game genre involves sword-play, and our game will incorporate sword fights," Gamel says. "But there is a lot more to role-playing games than just fighting. players will get heavily involved in a role playing game."

Krishna says that players will get heavily involved in a role-playing game such as Electronic Arts’ Lord of the Rings title.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Spammers Shift to Blogs and IM

A growing number of spammers are using mobile text messaging, blogs, instant messaging, and social-networking sites to deliver their unsolicited sales pitches, a new report has found.

Despite the increased prevalence of advanced spam-fighting tools, spam is once again on the rise, and spammers are abandoning more traditional methods of electronic communication in favor of those that permit more targeted spam blasts, according to new research by MessageLabs.

The research also indicated that spammers have begun to develop more sophisticated and malicious software to harvest e-mail addresses and even steal the identity of unsuspecting netizens.

"The increased convergence of threats across e-mail, Web, and instant messaging - combined with the increased sophistication of techniques - is an interesting new development," said Mark Sunner, chief technology officer at MessageLabs. "A harmless looking e-mail can quickly become a Web threat."

Old-style e-mail spam, the report indicated, has lost some momentum as the most popular medium for unsolicited commercial messages as spammers have turned their attention to newer communications channels.

Blogs, for example, have become a quagmire of comments posted by spammers that contain links to "disposable spam domains," MessageLabs found.

Spammers have started using social-networking sites such as MySpace to create phony, yet convincing, profiles containing links to "automated instant messaging ’chat-bot’ sirens" that entice unwary MySpacers to "lucrative webcam sites" and then either advertise their wares or attempt to plant spyware on their computers.

In addition, the spammers are using bait in the form of "friend requests" that are generated by special software to target online profiles in large numbers, the report said.

The increased effectiveness of spam filters for e-mail and the lack of any such filters for newer communication technologies are part of the reason spammers have turned to new channels to distribute their messages, explained Paul Stamp, an analyst at Forrester.

"Whereas most companies and service providers have reasonably effective spam filters, new communication channels are largely unprotected and offer rich pickings for spammers wanting to make sure their messages get

through," Stamp said.

But not all is lost for blogging and instant messaging, analysts say. Vendors who have concentrated their efforts on security for the Web and e-mail are starting to keep an eye on these new channels, Stamp pointed out.

Instant-messaging spam and blog spam promise to make these channels of communication as useless as e-mail would be without spam protection, he concluded.

Microsoft Fights Web Spam

Researchers at Microsoft this week released a new report and tool aimed at preventing Web spammers from exploiting Internet search engines to drive traffic to spam URLs.

The tool, called the Strider Search Defender, identifies spam URLs that are being distributed through social networking, forum, and blog-hosting Web sites, and can prevent those URLs from being indexed by search engines, said Yi-Min Wang, group manager of the Cybersecurity and Systems Management Research Group in Microsoft Research.

Instead of commenting on user pages of popular forums and blog sites - such as Google BlogSpot or MySpace - spammers will send URLs that link to spam Web sites to as many Internet forum pages as they can, he said. Since these URLs appear so frequently on valid Web sites, search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft’s own MSN will index them and they will begin appearing in search results, Wang said.

"They create a URL they want people to click and they put that into every possible open forum and guest book they can," he said. "Some search engines will see that this URL is everywhere on the Web so [they think] it should be popular. But it doesn’t have the kind of relevance to be in the top search-engine results."

The tool uses elements of technology previously developed in Microsoft Research in projects called Strider, HoneyMonkey, and Typo Patrol to search forums that have been spammed and to identify spam URLs in the hope of removing them before they are indexed by search engines. It also has an element that can distinguish between legitimate URLs on Web forums and spam URLs, Wang said.

In the cases when a spammer uses what is called a "doorway domain" to set up a spam site, the tool can identify the domain that is being exploited and notify its administrators, he said. A doorway domain is a legitimate URL, such as www.blogger.com, that spammers use to set up a spam site so it looks like a valid Web site, and thus will fool users and search engines.

"If they put [what looks like a] blog URL into your forum and everyone else’s, they will fool the search engine," Wang said.

In addition to specifications for the tool, Microsoft Research also published information in its report to encourage owners of free Web-hosting sites, search engines, and publicly accessible Web forums to do what they can to prevent Web spammers from exploiting search engines.

Wang said free Web-hosting sites such as MySpace and Google BlogSpot can use Microsoft’s methodology to identify spammers that might be using their sites as doorway domains. He said he hopes that search-engine companies will use the specifications for the tool described in the report to optimize their search engines to ferret out spam URLs.

Additionally, users who have blogs or forums on Web-hosting sites can help alleviate the problem of Web spamming by shutting down sites that are still active online but that they no longer visit or use, Wang said.

Congress Hears Testimony on DOPA

Debate began in earnest this week over federal legislation that would ban access to MySpace, Facebook, and other social-networking Web sites at U.S. public schools and libraries.

Supporters of the proposed bill are touting it as an effective way to protect children from sexual predators, while those opposed to it are warning that it won’t solve the problem it tries to address and amounts instead to Internet censorship.

During a hearing on Tuesday held by a House subcommittee to discuss the Deleting Online Predators Act of 2006 (DOPA), Rep. Joe Barton (news, bio, voting record) (D-Texas), said that as participation in Internet "social communities" rises daily, so do the news reports of a multitude of potential dangers these new sites pose.

"Schools and libraries that receive service subsidies have an obligation to ensure that their subsidized communications services do not become a hunting ground for pedophiles," he said. "If social networking sites are not taking the necessary precautions to prevent the exploitation of children on their sites, then, at the very least, Congress should prohibit the use of federally-mandated funds to access Internet sites that put children in harm’s way."

Echoing those remarks was Greg Abbott, Attorney General of Texas, who cited several instances in which investigators using social-networking sites caught sexual predators who had tried to solicit minors in chat rooms.

While parents and schools bear some responsibility in monitoring the children’s behavior, said Abbott, "The great weight of the problem must be shouldered by the very creators and hosts of these networking sites and chat rooms that provide the opportunity for child predators."

Protecting children is a noble objective, said Chris Kelly, chief privacy officer at Facebook, but he expressed concern over the vague nature of the "easily access" or "may easily be subject to" standards that DOPA uses as a basis for cracking down on a social-networking site.

"We are not certain that there is an effective way to articulate likelihood of such an event, though we do appreciate the attempt to distinguish between a distant possibility and a more easily foreseeable one," Kelly testified. He noted that any federal legislation should encourage the use of technology to protect children but avoid discouraging the "pro-social aspects" of online sites.

Offering a similar take was Beth Yoke of the American Library Association, who said that language used in DOPA is flawed because the bill uses the term "social networking sites" to describe almost all interactive Web applications in which users converse or otherwise interact with each other.

"The popularity of interactive online environments is extending to the corporate world, as a number of businesses, including corporate leaders like Ernst & Young and IBM, are increasingly moving to the use of interactive Web applications as a primary mode of business communication," Yoke testified.

Visited primarily by teenagers and young adults, social networks such as MySpace and Facebook are collections of online profiles that include photos, blogs, and other content. Teens use the sites to connect to other teens, voice opinions, and make new friends.

The hugely popular sites, while seemingly innocuous, have come under fire recently from critics claiming that they amount to huge databases of victims for child predators. In fact, MySpace was sued for $30 million recently by a 14-year-old girl who alleges she was sexually assaulted by another user of the site.

No one can fault the government for attempting to protect children, said Mukul Krishna, an analyst at Frost & Sullivan, in a recent interview. But the legislation is too broadly written to enforce, he said, and, as written, would block access to Yahoo, Google, and plethora of other sites.

"You cannot fault the thought behind it, but, clearly, a lot of thought did not go into doing anything but making a lot of noise," Krishna said, "because everyone knows that, as it is, the bill cannot be passed."

News Corp. Launches Online Safety Campaign

The parent company of MySpace.com and Fox is devoting millions of dollars in television air time and online ad space for a public service campaign on Internet safety.

Central to News Corp.’s campaign, announced Thursday, is a spot featuring Kiefer Sutherland, who plays Jack Bauer on the Fox action drama "24."

"On TV Jack Bauer has 24 hours to make the world safe. In real life it only takes a few minutes to do the same for our kids," Sutherland says. "To protect them you don’t need the latest state-of-the-art technology. You just need a few simple tips: Don’t let them run into trouble on the Internet - use common sense."

The 20-second ad then directs viewers to CommonSense.com, a site run by Common Sense Media, a nonprofit group that monitors and reviews media and entertainment for parents. There, parents may download a guidebook and a tip card on Internet safety, including a recommendation that they become involved with what their kids do online.

The campaign comes as parents, schools and law-enforcement officials increasingly warn about the dangers of sexual predators at social-networking sites, which provide messaging and other tools to encourage users to expand their circles of friends.

MySpace has gotten the brunt of the attention given its position as the industry leader, with some 92 million registered users, about 20 percent of them minors.

In June, the mother of a Texas teenager who claims she was sexually assaulted by another MySpace user sued the social-networking site and News Corp., seeking $30 million in damages. The lawsuit claims MySpace is negligent in protecting teen users despite numerous warnings of the dangers.

Attorneys general from at least four states also have issued calls for MySpace to do more to protect teens.

Over the past several months, MySpace has responded to the concerns by hiring a safety chief and changing its privacy policies to try to make it more difficult for adults to contact younger teens.

MySpace and other News Corp. sites also had earlier run ads aimed at educating users about the dangers.

The new campaign is directed at educating parents and teens on what they can do.

"We can build the best technology features in the world and the best safety features, but unless we raise education and awareness around the use of those, it doesn’t do anything," said Hemanshu Nigam, MySpace’s chief security officer.

James Steyer, chief executive of Common Sense Media, said the campaign will be especially important for parents and educators because "a lot of older folks have no idea about what their kids are doing on the Internet."

The spot is to run on several Fox cable stations, including FX, Fox Movie Channel and the National Geographic channel. Online video and banner ads will appear on MySpace.com, FoxSports.com, IGN.com, AmericanIdol.com and other Fox Interactive Media sites.

Nigam could not say how much News Corp. was committing, other than to say it was "millions and millions of dollars worth of time and space."

EU Slaps Microsoft With Fine

European Union regulators fined Microsoft an extra 280.5 million euros ($357.3 million) on Wednesday for defying a 2004 antitrust ruling, and warned the company to comply or face bigger fines in future.

The tough new penalty is the first of its kind and comes on top of a record 497 million euro fine the Commission imposed in its landmark antitrust decision against the U.S. software giant in March 2004.

"The EU Commission cannot allow such illegal conduct to continue indefinitely. No company is above the law," Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes told reporters.

The Commission required Microsoft to provide technical information to rival server software makers after it found the company abused the dominance of its Windows operating system, used worldwide on 95 percent of personal

computers, to squeeze out competitors.

"Microsoft did not even come close to providing adequate information," Kroes said.

The fine covers the period from December 16 to June 20 at 1.5 million euros daily. It fell short of a possible daily maximum of 2 million euros. Microsoft faces a further fine of up to 3 million euros a day if it still does not comply by July 31.

The move signals the Commission’s determination to force the company to obey its order and a loss of patience after Microsoft had two years to comply and used virtually every available legal and court procedure to spin out the process.

"It puts (Kroes) in a position of authority generally, which will make business across the board much more inclined to comply," said Chris Bright, a London competition lawyer, adding that energy companies could be the next focus.

The Commission’s hardline approach contrasts with that of the United States, which in 2000 had similar findings against Microsoft but ended up reaching a settlement on sanctions. Last month, the U.S. judge supervising the case called the implementation of the settlement "disappointing."

The American process was so troubled that Microsoft and the court started over again in May this year, taking a cue from what the U.S. judge called "the European Commission’s direction." Kroes noted this new U.S. approach on Wednesday.

Microsoft said it has made massive efforts to comply with the Commission’s 2004 ruling and now has 300 people working to complete its package by an agreed deadline of July 18.

It called the fine unjustified, but said that will not slow its effort to comply. Microsoft, which has appealed against every ruling against it so far by the Commission, said on Wednesday it will appeal against this decision too.

"We do not believe that any fine, let alone a fine of this magnitude, is appropriate given the lack of clarity in the Commission’s original decision," said Brad Smith, the company’s top lawyer, in a conference call.

But he said that Microsoft remains totally committed to full compliance with the Commission’s 2004 decision.

Kroes called the original order "crystal clear." It required interoperability information on reasonable and non-discriminatory terms.

The EU’s second highest court is already reviewing an underlying challenge by Microsoft to the original Commission decision, and conducted a hearing in April.

After years of investigation, the Commission found in 2004 that Microsoft used the near-monopoly power of its Windows operating system to harm competitors making workgroup servers, which run printing and sign-on services in offices.

It ordered Microsoft to give rivals the information needed so their servers

could compete on a level playing field with Microsoft's own by interconnecting smoothly with Windows.

It also found that Microsoft harmed competitors by illegally bundling its Windows Media Player with the operating system, leaving consumers little incentive to buy rival software to watch films or listen to music.

The bundling issue poses concerns already voiced by Kroes about Microsoft's next operating system, Vista, which could package Internet search functions or software that creates fixed documents and thus threaten Google and Adobe.

"The launch next year (of Vista) will hopefully be in a shape in which all those 2004 decision items are taken into account," Kroes said.

Microsoft's Smith said the company had made "design changes" to Vista after Kroes wrote to the company in late March and that he expected feedback from the Commission soon.

States To Sue Chipmakers

Thirty-four U.S. states will sue seven computer memory chip makers on Friday, including Micron Technology and Infineon Technologies, over charges they conspired to rig the U.S. market to keep prices artificially high.

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer said on Thursday 33 other states would join a lawsuit alleging the chip makers violated state and federal antitrust laws during a conspiracy to fix prices for dynamic random access memory, or DRAM, chips, from 1998 through June 2002, when there was a glut in the market.

The lawsuit follows a U.S. Justice Department probe launched in 2002 that resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in fines levied against Samsung, Hynix, Infineon, Elpida and other chipmakers.

The federal investigation followed a sharp plunge in the prices for memory chips used in computers and other electronics, which forced a wave of industry consolidation and pushed several chip makers near bankruptcy.

Micron spokesman Dan Francisco said he could not comment specifically on the lawsuit because the company had not yet seen it. But he noted that the Boise, Idaho-based chip maker has been in talks to resolve the issue.

"We have been involved in discussions with state attorneys general for a long period of time," Francisco said. "As I understand it they wanted to get these cases on file while we discuss the potential for resolution."

Germany's Infineon could not immediately be reached for comment on the complaint seeking damages estimated as high as hundreds of millions of dollars.

The complaint, to be filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, charges the companies with fixing DRAM chip prices, artificially restraining supply and rigging bids for contracts.

Those actions caused computer makers such as Apple Computer, Compaq Computer, Dell, Gateway, Hewlett-Packard Co. and International Business

Machines Corp. to pay more for chips and then pass those costs on to consumers, said Florida Attorney General Charlie Crist, another lead plaintiff in the case.

The largest four of the DRAM makers - Samsung, Hynix, Micron and Infineon - and their U.S. units control roughly 70 percent of the U.S. market, which in 2003 represented about $5 billion of the $17 billion in worldwide sales.

Lockyer said he was one of the leaders of the lawsuit because much of the alleged illegal conduct took place in California, home to Silicon Valley, where many of the chip makers have operations.

The lawsuit names many of the world's top-ranked memory chip makers including South Korea's Hynix Semiconductor Inc.; Taiwan's Mosel Vitelic and Nanya Technology; Japan's Elpida Memory, a joint venture of Hitachi and NEC; and NEC Electronics's NEC Electronics America.

An Elpida spokesman declined to comment as did a representative from NEC, who said the company has not yet seen the lawsuit. The other chip makers named in the lawsuit could not immediately be reached for comment.

The lawsuit does not name South Korea's Samsung Electronics, the world's leading memory chip maker, because California has entered into an agreement with the company in order to reach a potential settlement, said Tom Dresslar, a spokesman for the California attorney general.

ISPs Urged To Lock Out File-sharers

The British music industry stepped up its campaign against illegal file-sharing on Monday by demanding that two Internet service providers suspend 59 accounts it believes are being used to swap copyrighted songs.

The British Phonographic Industry trade group called on Cable & Wireless and Tiscali to join a crusade against consumer practices that have undermined music companies in recent years.

"We have said for months that it is unacceptable for ISPs to turn a blind eye to industrial-scale copyright infringement," BPI Chairman Peter Jamieson said in a statement.

"We are providing Tiscali and Cable & Wireless with unequivocal evidence of copyright infringement via their services," he added. "It is now up to them to put their house in order and pull the plug on these people."

Fans Pushing Back Against File-Sharing Suits

Music fans from Texas to Dusseldorf are organizing in an attempt to push back against the music industry's lawsuits over online piracy.

The Electronic Freedom Foundation is reviving its efforts to ignite a lobbying movement among music fans and recording artists. In addition to updating its page on file sharing, the group is urging its blog readers to sign petitions asking governments on both sides of the Atlantic to do away with lawsuits against music fans.

"There are over 60 million people in the United States who use file sharing - more than the number of people who voted for our current President," EFF states. "If we all band together and stand up for our rights, we can change the law."

Derek Slater characterized the Recording Industry Association of America's campaign against peer-to-peer file sharing "irrational" and urged Americans and Britons to sign petitions to develop constructive alternatives so artists can earn money, while listeners share music.

The latest push appears to be a response to BPI's file-sharing lawsuit.

While an American petition urging Congress to end the music sharing lawsuits has gained 80,000 signatures through EFF's Web site, the newer British one on Flowerburger.com appears to have less than 200 signatures from people scattered across the globe. The site claims to support musicians and their earnings but opposes suing the fans for payment.

EBay Faces Competitive Threat

EBay Inc. faced a double blow Thursday as it announced a key executive's plans to leave and an analyst said Google Inc.'s new online payment service represents a bigger threat than expected to the Internet auction company's health.

Jeff Jordan, who most recently was president of eBay's PayPal payment business, led eBay's North America division from 2000 to 2004 and had been presumed by some analysts as the likely successor to Chief Executive Meg Whitman. He said in an interview that he wants to spend more time with his wife and two children.

He will be replaced by Rajiv Dutta, who has been with the company since 1998, serving as chief financial officer, head of strategy and president of Skype, the Internet phone service eBay acquired last year.

One report, by Lehman Bros. analyst Douglas Anmuth, said Jordan's departure was "highly significant" because it comes as eBay is facing new challenges and competitive threats.

"We view the senior management changes announced today with concern as the come at a critical time for eBay as it seeks to stimulate growth in its core markets while integrating various acquisitions," he wrote.

Besides eBay's $2.6 billion purchase of Skype, the company last year bought Shopping.com for $685 million.

Whitman said in an interview that she was undaunted by Jordan's departure, noting that Dutta and other executives taking new roles were well acquainted with eBay's business.

"EBay has very deep management bench strength," she said, calling that "a testament to the strong management team that's been built over the last five or six years."

The disclosure of Jordan's plans came the same day that another analyst, Citigroup's Mark Mahaney, cut his earnings growth estimates for eBay, based

on his analysis of Google Checkout, an online payments service unveiled last week. Mahaney slashed his target price for eBay to $40 from $51.

Mahaney said he found Checkout, which has been under development for less than a year, to be faster, easier and less expensive than PayPal.

"As we see it, this speaks volumes about Google product development skills and PayPal's lack of innovation," Mahaney wrote.

"As the growth potential of PayPal off of eBay has been part of our core investment thesis on the stock, we view this Checkout development as materially raising eBay's risk profile."

Dutta responded that PayPal, with more than 105 million account holders, remained the uncontested leader in a terrain fraught with risks.

"People will tell you that launching a payment service is complex," he said. "As with any competitor we will pay a lot of attention to what anyone does in this space."

Dutta declined to say whether eBay intended to lower PayPal's fees to address its competition.

Among the other management changes, Alex Kazim, currently vice president of products for Skype, will assume Dutta's role as president of Skype.

Former Shopping.com CEO Lorrie Norrington is becoming president of eBay International. She replaces Matt Bannick, who will oversee eBay's initiatives in corporate philanthropy and the developing world.

Firefox 2.0 Beta Set To Launch

Get ready for a new round in the ongoing fight among Internet browsers. Mozilla is set to formally release the first beta of Firefox 2.0, a highly anticipated follow-up to the increasingly popular browser that many say will steal the thunder from Internet Explorer 7, Microsoft's next-generation browser that is slated to be released later this summer.

Although Mozilla already has made a test version of the beta available for download by way of FTP, the company will not formally launch Firefox 2.0 Beta until later this week, "until all testing has been complete," said Alex Guerra, a spokesperson for Mozilla.

"Possibly Wednesday or Thursday," he noted.

New features in Firefox 2.0 include improved performance, new tabbed browsing controls, an antiphishing tool, and an integrated spell checker.

Samir Bhavnani, director of research at Current Analysis, pointed out that although Firefox has been able to garner a lot of positive publicity, Microsoft's Internet Explorer still has "a lion's share" of the browser market.

Bhavnani downplayed the new features in Firefox 2.0, saying users might not see a whole lot of difference between 2.0 and earlier versions of the browser.

"A lot of changes are background changes, which are security in nature," he said.

In related news, Amsterdam-based OneStat, a company that monitors Internet statistics, released a report on Sunday revealing that Firefox has a total global usage share of 12.93 percent, a figure that increased by 1.14 points since May.

By way of comparison, the total global usage share of Internet Explorer is 83.05 percent, which represents a 2.21 percent decrease since May.

OneStat's report found that, in the U.S., the most popular browsers as of July are: Microsoft Internet Explorer at 79.78 percent, Firefox at 15.82 percent, Apple's Safari at 3.28 percent, Opera at 0.81 percent, and Netscape at 0.20 percent.

Microsoft Sees January Vista Release

Microsoft Corp's release of Windows Vista should begin in November with roll-out to businesses and broader release of the software to general customers by January, company officials said on Tuesday.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates told local software partners at a Cape Town technology conference there was an "80 percent chance" Vista would be ready as scheduled for broad release in January, a company spokeswoman said.

The spokeswoman, who asked not to be named, said the current plan was to begin releasing Vista to business customers in November, with the general release in January.

There has been speculation that the much-expected new operating system could be delayed, although this has been denied by top company officials.

Microsoft originally targeted a 2005 launch for the new Windows, then pushed the release to 2006 before announcing in March that Vista would again be delayed to improve the product.

The new versions of Microsoft's Windows and Office software are central to the company's efforts to revive a stock that has underperformed major indexes since the start of 2002.

Gates made his comments to Microsoft software partners at a conference in Cape Town to discuss how technology can be harnessed to boost Africa's competitiveness.

Man Controls PC - With His Mind

A paralyzed man using a new brain sensor has been able to move a computer cursor, open e-mail and control a robotic device simply by thinking about doing it, a team of scientists said on Wednesday.

They believe the BrainGate sensor, which involves implanting electrodes in the brain, could offer new hope to people paralyzed by injuries or illnesses.

"This is the first step in an ongoing clinical trial of a device that is encouraging for its potential to help people with paralysis," Dr Leigh Hochberg, of Massachusetts General Hospital, said in an interview.

The 25-year-old man who suffered paralysis of all four limbs three years earlier completed tasks such moving a cursor on a screen and controlling a robotic arm.

He is the first of four patients with spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy, stroke or motor neurone disease testing the brain-to-movement system developed by Cyberkinetics Neurotechnology Systems Inc in Masschusetts.

"This is the dawn of major neurotechnology where the ability to take signals out of the brain has taken a big step forward. We have the ability to put signals into the brain but getting signals out is a real challenge. I think this represents a landmark event," said Professor John Donoghue of Brown University in Rhode Island and the chief scientific officer of Cyberkinetics.

The scientists implanted a tiny silicon chip with 100 electrodes into an area of the brain responsible for movement. The activity of the cells was recorded and sent to a computer which translated the commands and enabled the patient to move and control the external device.

"This part of the brain, the motor cortex, which usually sends its signals down the spinal cord and out to the limbs to control movement, can still be used by this participant to control an external device, even after years had gone by since his spinal cord injury," added Hochberg, a co-author of the study published in the journal Nature.

Although it is not the first time brain activity has been used to control a cursor, Stephen Scott of Queen’s University in Ontario, Canada said it advances the technology.

"This research suggests that implanted prosthetics are a viable approach for assisting severely impaired individuals to communicate and interact with the environment," he said in a commentary in the journal.

In a separate study, researchers from Stanford University Schools of Medicine and Engineering described a faster way to process signals from the brain to control a computer or prosthetic device.

"Our research is starting to show that, from a performance perspective, this type of prosthetic system is clinically viable," Stephen Ryu, an assistant professor of neurosurgery at Stanford, said in as statement.

Bartending, RFID Style

On a busy Saturday night, a good bartender makes a lot of money for the bar’s owner, but an overly generous bartender-or one fond of pouring free drinks for friends-can cost the owner even more.

A Miami-based 7-year-old beverage-monitoring software company is drinking from the keg of RFID and is selling a tilt switch that attaches to bottles and updates an Internet database every time the bottle is poured. Hilton,

Hyatt, Outback Steakhouse, TGI Fridays and others are reportedly testing the system.

It’s not merely recording how many times the bottle is poured, but it factors in the tilt of the bottle, the duration of the pour and the bartender’s pouring style to calculate how much liquid is leaving the bottle.

"The software converts the tilt into an estimated volume, and the conversion is automatically perfected based on the history of each bottle; hence it becomes more accurate over time and adapts to each bartender’s habits. When the bottle is empty, our sensor knows it and the software readjusts the historical pours of each bottle to the known volume of the bottle," said Beverage Metrics CEO David Teller, who said his company has between $5 million and $10 million in annual revenue. "Our system reconciles pours to ring-ups and recipes and automatically decides what is a long pour that should be changed to two pours [and] when to combine short pours in sequence."

Because the server that watches the tilt-tracking RFID system also tracks the POS (point-of-sale) system, it can also know what ingredients bartenders are using to make drinks and whether they are following the authorized recipes in addition to whether they are pouring too much or too little.

Gentag is touting a way to add classic active-tag capabilities-including temperature sensors-to lower-cost passive RFID tags. Click here to read more.

Teller said he expects the sensors to eventually sell for "less than $2 with housing, attachment means, on/off switch, tilt switch, TI micro, five-year battery and RF circuit." Right now, though, the price is closer to $5 plus a subscription fee roughly equivalent to about 1 percent of revenue, Teller said.

Teller argues that his system fits perfectly within the typical restaurant supply chain.

"We are at the cusp of changing the hospitality industry as significantly as POS did, by deploying miniature active RFID tags to every bottle received off the truck. The system reconciles the purchase order to the received goods, and the sensors ping every hour, thereby updating the inventory automatically," he said. "When a bottle arrives at a bar or banquet, the system knows where it is by the receiver location. When a bottle is tilted, the inventory is reduced by that amount and value. When the drink is rung up on the POS, it is reconciled against the pour. If there’s no payment registered, the open pour is an alert. When the bottle is empty, it automatically builds the purchase order."

Although the system’s readers have a range of about 50 feet, Teller said a bartender can’t outsmart the system by pouring a drink beyond the range of the sensor-or simply disabling the sensor-because all of the tags are in periodic content with the server.

"It issues an alert if the tag is removed," he said. "If the sensor doesn’t ping, ’Hey, I’m here’ after an hour, we start paying attention to that guy."

John Fontanella, an RFID analyst with the Aberdeen Group, dubbed Teller’s system "an interesting idea" but wondered whether wireless rings around the

bottles would scare off customers and chill some of the bartender-drinker relationship.

"Will it be invisible to customers? Remember those machines that were used to accurately pour a drink every time? They were all over the place, and now I never see one. There is a reason why: It ruins the intimacy created between customer and bartender," Fontanella said. "Good bartenders take care of good customers. It's as simple as that, and that's what brings them back. If the customer is unaware, or if it is in a bar with a great deal of transient traffic, it makes sense."

But Fontanella is even more cynical about whether it will truly minimize theft. "I'm already thinking about how bartenders will beat this," he said. "They will find a way."

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